Technology First and the DSP Workforce Crisis: Ohio's Future Paved By Technology

Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

August 2022

Ohio Technology First is an initiative created to promote remote supports and assistive technology. This gives Ohio the opportunity to take key steps toward reducing the strain of the DSP workforce crisis and start on a path paved by technology that will change the support options for Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

Workforce Crisis

Ohio's disability service and supports system is experiencing a statewide, severe workforce shortage. There are challenges in hiring, training, and retaining people to work as direct support professionals (DSPs). Long hours, increased job responsibilities, and low wages of DSPs all play a role in the current state of the workforce across Ohio.

The following report will provide valuable data that shows a path paved by a stronger workforce, one that can provide the intricate and person-centered supports Ohioans with developmental disabilities need and expect. The data indicates that a necessary first step toward change should start with the higher use of remote supports and assistive technology. These services which are embedded in technology can reduce the strain on in-person supports by allowing some people to be more independent and support providers to expand the outreach of scarce DSP resources.

To better understand the benefits and solutions technology can provide, the problems caused by the workforce crisis must first be understood.

DSP Recruitment and Retention

It is no secret that the vacancy rate among DSPs has increased in the last three years. From 2018 to 2020, DSPs have seen an 11 percent increase in vacant part-time positions (16% to 27%) and a four percent increase in vacant full-time positions (13% to 17%). This represents approximately 8,400 vacancies in the DSP workforce of approximately 40,000.[1] With increases in vacancy rates, the DSPs that are still employed are often working more hours to fulfill the needs of those receiving services. Agencies across Ohio are constantly hiring and training due to these vacancies. As a result of this constant hiring, nearly 33 percent of DSPs have been employed less than one year, and 58 percent of all DSPs left after being employed less than 1 year.[2]

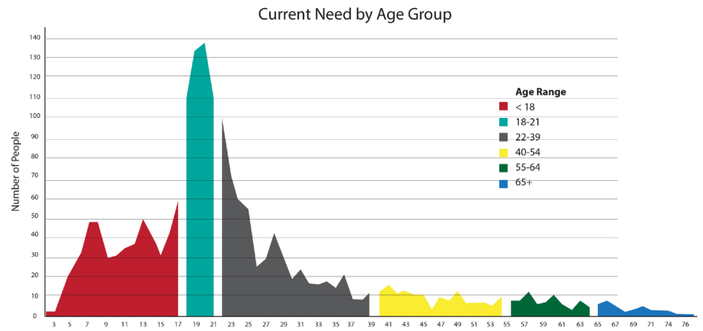
The average starting wage for a DSP is $11.21 per hour and the average overall wage for a DSP is $14.42 per hour as of 2020.[3] While wages can play a factor in vacancy rates, DSPs also report retention is directly tied to support from their employer and preparedness for the support they provide for people receiving services.

Looking Toward the Future

While the prevalence of disabilities increases, it is difficult to forecast how many people with disabilities will have the need for the additional support and services provided in Ohio. However, by looking at Waiting List Assessment data, we can get a glimpse into how many people may need

1 Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, 2020 Direct Support Professional (DSP) Compensation Survey Highlights. (January 2022). (3) https://dodd.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/26b8182b-d6d0-438f-97c6-ee615f593d77/2020_DSP_Compensation_Survey.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGIK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-26b8182b-d6d0-438f-97c6-ee615f593d77-nWwPfzU
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid. (6)

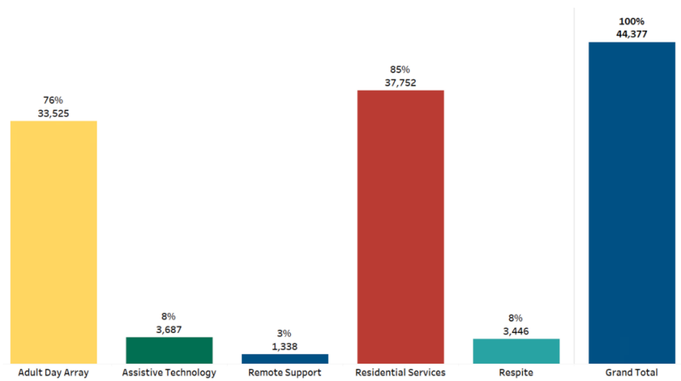
these services in the near future. The data represented in the "Age and Waiver Distribution" graph from Ohio's Waiting List Assessment shows most people identified with a current need are under the age of 30. This graph shows that there is a greater number of people under the age of 30 who have an assessed, unmet need for services.



The workforce crisis will continue to be an issue as more people enter Ohio's service system. The developmental disability system must find ways to include technology as a support option for Ohioans with developmental disabilities. This information shows that, even though the system is currently in the midst of a workforce crisis, the situation will only accelerate as children and young adults with current and immediate needs begin to receive services. If their needs can be met, even partially with technology, it will help create a more efficient delivery system that allows for the DSPs who are available to provide the essential in-person support for people who require it.

Remote Supports and Assistive Technology

For years, remote supports and assistive technology have been underutilized in favor of residential services, respite, and adult day array. Residential services include Adult Family Living, Shared Living, HPC, OSOC (OSOC data not all-inclusive. Comes from claims data not MSS), Adult Foster Care, Participant-Directed Goods and Services, and Community Inclusion.



Ohio's Technology First Initiative has brought the use of remote supports and assistive technology to the forefront. Although this additional focus is a good start, adjusting how and when in-person supports for people with developmental disabilities are truly needed will take additional effort.

Since 2019, remote supports and assistive technology have been a small piece of the service puzzle. The Remote Supports Service began July 1, 2018, and the Assistive Technology Service began January 1, 2019. This graph shows the usage of these services and the percentage of each from 2019 through 2022. As represented in the graph, remote supports were only used three percent of the time as a Medicaid waiver service between 2019-2022, followed by assistive technology at eight percent.

Remote supports were used by 1,357 unique people from July 2018 to May 2022, with their average age being 42 years old. Based on the age and waiver distribution graph, there is a unique opportunity to begin using technology services to assist not only the adult population but the younger age groups

as well by making it the first option before using in-person support
Remote supports can be used by a variety of people, including those who have complex needs. Sometimes people with complex needs may act in a way that poses a direct and serious risk of harm to their physical safety or the safety of others, or their actions increase the likelihood that they will be legally sanctioned, which could include items such as eviction, arrest, or being incarcerated. Behavioral Support Strategies that include restrictive measures may be needed to keep the person safe. Even if a person has restrictive measures, technology can be used to increase the person's opportunities to live, learn, work, and thrive in their home and community. From July 2018 to May 2022, there have been 245 people who have restrictive measures in their plan and were also using technology (remote supports and/or assistive technology) for support.

Technology is a Solution

The information provided throughout this report shows it is imperative that, as a system, we embrace the possibilities that technology offers Ohioans with developmental disabilities, their families, and providers of service and it is essential that conversations about technology are a central part of every single person's planning process.

While there are certain things that the system can do to recruit, retain, train, and compensate DSPs, using remote supports and assistive technology is another part of the solution. Technology will not replace the need for DSPs, but it can provide a redistribution of where the need is and extend the reach of DSPs.

The challenge now is prioritizing technology to lessen the effects of the workforce crisis before it worsens. It is not a matter of if it will happen, it is a matter of when. Adopting technology now as one of many solutions gives Ohio a head start on limiting the adverse effects of the workforce crisis.

Our Commitment to Technology First

Ohio's Technology First is an initiative to:

- Ensure that people with developmental disabilities have increased opportunities to live, learn, work, and thrive in their homes and communities through state-of-the-art planning, innovative technology, and supports that focus on their talents, interests, and skills.
- Promote remote supports and assistive technology, so Ohio can take key steps toward reducing the strain of the DSP workforce emergency and start on a path paved by technology that will change the support options for Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

Since Technology First efforts began in 2012, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) increased the availability of technology to ensure people have access no matter where they choose to live, learn, work, or play. DODD embraced this initiative through state policy, operations, funding, training, and technical assistance.

While efforts have increased utilization, there is a large number of people who could benefit from assistive and remote technologies. Ohio's DD system supports over 95,000 people with developmental disabilities, with over 41,000 enrolled in a Medicaid waiver and over 5,000 in intermediate care facilities (ICF).[4] To strengthen Ohio's Technology First initiative and increase access to technology for

4 Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (2022). DataOhio Portal:. https://data.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/data/view/dodd-home-and-community-based-waiver-information

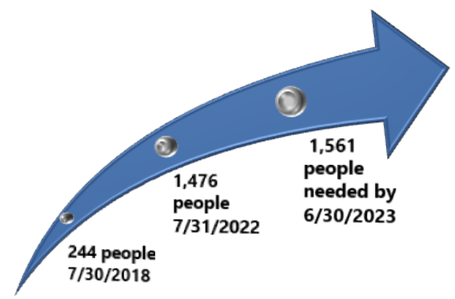
people with developmental disabilities, DODD will focus on the below goals:

- Empower people with developmental disabilities and families to explore technology as an option through person-centered outreach, and education.
- Align state and local policies, procedures, eligibility, enrollment, and planning and services across agencies to increase the use of technology for people with developmental disabilities.
- Develop the level of comfort, skill, and knowledge of county boards and providers to increase the use of technology in service delivery and business operations.
- Increase the use of innovative technology across service delivery and business operations.
- Engage with the business community to increase the use of innovative technology across Ohio for people with developmental disabilities.
- Establish benchmarks and measure progress and achievement of technology outcomes.

DODD has set key benchmarks for Technology First in Ohio. These benchmarks are the key indicators to Ohio making progress on taking key steps toward reducing the strain of the DSP workforce crisis and starting on a path paved by technology that will change the support options for Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

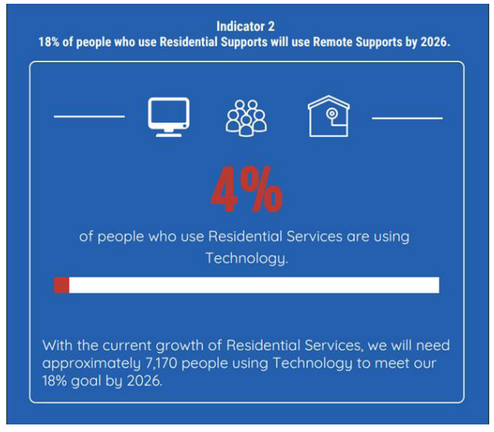
Indicator 1: Remote Supports service will increase 15 percent by June 30, 2023

As of July 31, 2022, there were 1,476 people utilizing remote supports. If remote supports continue to grow at this current rate, Ohio will meet its goal of increasing Remote Supports 15 percent (1,561 people) by June 30, 2023.

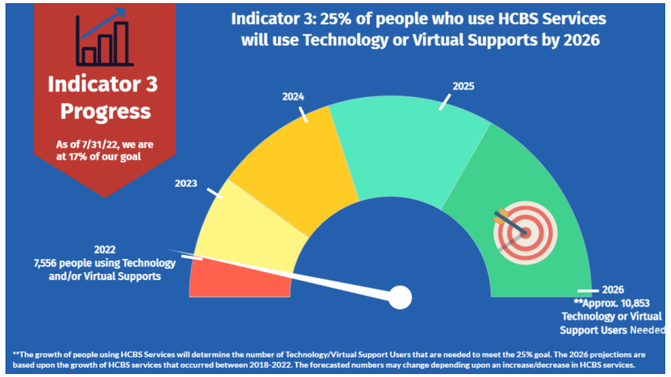


Indicator 2: 18 percent of people who use residential supports will use remote supports by 2026

As of July 31, 2022, there are 1,476 people that are utilizing remote supports and 38,945 people utilizing residential services on a Medicaid waiver. Of our 18 percent goal, we are currently at four percent of people using remote supports. With the current growth of residential services, we will need approximately 7,170 people using remote supports to meet our 18 percent goal by 2026.



Indicator 3: 25 percent of people who utilize HCBS Services will use Technology or Virtual Supports by 2026

As of July 31, 2022, there are 7,556 people that are utilizing remote supports, assistive technology, and virtual services, out of 45,367 people utilizing home and community-based waiver services.

We are currently at 17 percent of our 25 percent goal. With the current growth of home and community-based waiver services, we will need approximately 10,853 people using technology or virtual support to meet our 25 percent goal by 2026.